



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: February 13, 2020

Agenda Item: Woods Ranch WMA Timber Salvage, Region 1

Action Needed: Endorsement **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: The Wood's Ranch Wildlife Management Area (WRWMA) is 1,474 acres in size and located 5.5 miles north of Eureka, Montana. Approximately 530 acres of the WRWMA are forested, predominantly mature, mixed-conifer forest dominated by Douglas fir, western larch, Engelmann spruce, and ponderosa pine with several riparian forest areas adjacent to streams that are composed of a mix of hardwood species (black cottonwood, quaking aspen, paper birch) and conifers.

On Nov. 27, 2019, a major wind event hit northwest Montana, resulting in significant blowdown across the west side of the Whitefish Range and affecting the WRWMA. Most of the forested acreage on the WMA was found to be impacted to varying degrees with approximately 80 acres being severely impacted, directly precluding wildlife movements and use of the area by ungulates and people.

Given the extent of the damage and heightened risk of bark-beetle infestation to live stands of trees, FWP seeks endorsement by the commission to further evaluate the potential for a timber salvage of the blown down trees on the WRWMA. Because timber value rapidly declines from decay and wood-boring insects within the first year, timber salvage is being proposed now in order to move this project through the approval process so that, contingent on analysis and related decisions, work could potentially commence during the summer of 2020.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Upon endorsement by the commission, FWP would conduct an environmental assessment (EA) with the opportunity for public review and comment.

Alternatives and Analysis: No action would prescribe that the fallen trees remain on the ground indefinitely. This would increase the risk of bark beetle infestation to adjacent stands of live trees within one year, restrict ungulate movement in the blowdown area, and establish a high understory fire-fuel load on portions of the WRWMA. FWP would evaluate factors associated with timber salvage such as the ecological, economic, and social consequences. Tree salvage has the potential to affect (positively or negatively) soils and watersheds, risk of insect infestation, susceptibility to wildfire, reestablishment of understory vegetation, snag removal, and wildlife movement.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposal, allowing FWP to develop a more detailed proposal and associated analysis.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the timber salvage on the Woods Ranch WMA, allowing FWP to conduct further analysis and public review.